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White House Assesses Reports of Soviet Asat Laser Facilities

Washington—The White House is assessing intelligence reports suggesting that the Soviet Union has begun deployment of the world's first operational ground-based laser antisatellite system, and is in a position to break out of the antiballistic missile treaty with similar ABM laser developments, the stockpiling of ABM missile systems and new command facilities observed in the USSR.

A U. S. Air Force imaging reconnaissance satellite has photographed two new, unusually large high-technology facilities under construction on mountain tops near the Soviet-Afghanistan border. Intelligence agency assessments are that the facilities involve laser weapons.

Two Other Facilities

U. S. intelligence agencies do not agree, however, on whether the new facilities, spotted near Dushanbe and another site in the region, are operational antisatellite laser sites, laser development facilities that could eventually go operational or merely laser research facilities.

Some U. S. analysts believe the facilities will be operational Soviet Asat laser facilities that could be upgraded to antiballistic missile lasers with more advanced pointing and tracking systems.

Senior Strategic Defense Initiative officials said although there is debate on the exact nature of the two complexes, they dwarf all of the U. S. laser weapons development facilities. "Nothing in the U. S. directed energy program compares to what we see," one official said.

Another official said some analysts believe the Dushanbe site includes laser and microwave weapons systems and that the other site contains two laser systems.

Both sites are in an advanced state of construction and have only recently been discovered by U. S. intelligence.

Missile Stockpile

In addition to the laser facility issue, officials said there are indications the Soviets are stockpiling antiballistic missiles similar to the former U. S. Sprint/Spartan ABM system.

It is unknown whether this indicates an intention to break out of the ABM treaty with a more extensive deployment of ABM systems than currently allowed, or whether it is a continuation of a Soviet trait to overproduce and stockpile armaments, the SDI official said.

U. S. intelligence also is continuing to assess the discovery in the Caucasus region of a large, new Soviet radar that might be used for ABM battle management. □

Soviets said to build 2 laser bases

REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

The Soviet Union may have started deploying what will be the world's first operational ground-based laser anti-satellite system, Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine said yesterday.

The magazine said the White House was assessing intelligence reports suggesting this development as well as evidence that Moscow is now in a position to exceed the limits of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Aviation Week said a U.S. Air Force reconnaissance satellite has photographed two new, unusually large high-technology complexes under construction on mountain tops near the Soviet-Afghanistan border. Intelligence analysts believe the facilities involve laser weapons.

Some U.S. intelligence experts believe the sites will be operational Soviet anti-satellite laser installations that could be upgraded to anti-ballistic missile laser facilities with more advanced pointing and tracking systems, the magazine reported.

The magazine quoted senior officials with the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative program, sometimes called "star wars," as saying that while there is debate over the exact nature of the facilities, there is no doubt that they dwarf all U.S. facilities for the development of laser weapons.

Aviation Week also said that officials found signs that Moscow is stockpiling anti-ballistic missiles.

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